



Health Department

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CITY OF MILWAUKEE HEALTH DEPARTMENT SURVEYS AREA LABORATORIES FOR RECEIPT OF POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS FLU VIRUS

As reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over 4000 laboratories throughout the United States, Canada and 16 other countries were sent a specimen of A/H2N2 flu strain as part of routine Proficiency Testing (PT) by the College of American Pathologists (CAP) to meet laboratory accreditation. The A/H2N2 flu strain is similar to the type of influenza that was implicated in the 1957 "Asian Flu" pandemic. The strain is particularly virulent, easily transmissible and requires an abundance of caution during handling even within a controlled laboratory setting.

The City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) is conducting a survey of local area laboratories regarding the receipt and disposition of a potentially dangerous influenza specimen for the purpose of PT. Many laboratories to assure competency, perform critical testing of clinical specimens for disease identification.

The MHD in conjunction with the Wisconsin Division of Public Health has identified select laboratories in Milwaukee County that had received the specimens through the CAP PT program between November 2004 and March 2005. The MHD Public Health Laboratory was one of the local facilities that received a specimen on February 22nd. The MHD lab performed the requisite PT, submitted results and subsequently destroyed the specimen per protocol on February 28th. The MHD Public Health Laboratory is one of only three BioSafety Level III classified laboratories in the State of Wisconsin capable of handling highly virulent organisms as part of Federal and State bioterrorism readiness and response.

The MHD survey of local clinical laboratories indicates that those that had received PT specimens are in the process of destroying the samples and providing written evidence of compliance to CAP and the MHD. At this time, there is no discernable public health threat to the community or region nor evidence that laboratory precautions in the handling of these specimens at any of the facilities was compromised. Furthermore, the specimens appear to have been handled in an appropriate manner and without event.

"While the risk of exposure is minimal for Milwaukee residents, the City of Milwaukee Health Department remains greatly concerned along with the global public health community regarding the conditions which led to this occurrence," said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker, CHE.

At this time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working with the World Health Organization (WHO) in identifying all laboratories that have received the A/H2N2 specimen and ensuring that the samples are destroyed through autoclaving or incineration. CDC is recommending that laboratory workers are monitored for symptoms of influenza-like illness and that persons experiencing illness be tested and reported to the CDC as well as State and local public health authorities.

The MHD will provide updates to the public and media as significant information is forthcoming.